

Unit 5: Bureaucracies

In most countries, education is delivered via large-scale public-sector education bureaucracies. These bureaucracies are complex in a variety of ways. The relevant bureaucracies usually comprise multiple administrative agencies with different and sometimes overlapping functions (e.g., both the curriculum authority and the examinations board influencing what is taught). Furthermore, these agencies and functions are spread across different administrative levels (e.g., central, regional, district, and school). The relevant bureaucracies also face challenges as they aim to deliver education, which itself is a ‘thick’, complex task requiring co-creation between teachers, students, and other actors across numerous and varied classroom contexts.

Given the complexity, conventional civil service bureaucracies face difficult challenges around managing and delivering quality education. A common response to these challenges is a pattern of bureaucratic administration called ‘isomorphic mimicry’. Systems engaged in isomorphic mimicry are characterised by top-down, standardised management that depends on ‘thin’, input-based indicators such as how many textbooks have been distributed or how many students are enrolled. Such thin indicators, if successfully implemented, may enable the system to ‘look like’ it is doing the right thing, when in fact the inputs are not producing the desired ‘thick’ outputs (e.g., ensuring children are learning).

An alternative administrative paradigm involves a ‘thicker’ approach that is centred on a bureaucracy-wide sense of shared purpose or mission. Under this approach, individual bureaucrats are granted the autonomy to make decisions that respond to the needs and challenges of their specific contexts, in alignment with ‘thick’ indicators as goals. At the same time, bureaucrats must be supported with adequate training and resources that enable them to serve the shared purpose. This is particularly the case with the ‘middle tier’ of bureaucrats (e.g., district education officers) who can play a key role in maintaining alignment between the central government, and teachers and schools on the frontline.

After completing the unit, students should:

- Understand the multiple levels and multiple functions of education bureaucracies;
- Explain the limitations of conventional bureaucratic structures in implementing complex service delivery in education; and
- Understand the importance of alignment with a shared purpose and supporting and trusting bureaucrats with autonomy in improving the complex work of education bureaucracies.

Lectures

1. [Mission and motivation in public bureaucracies](#) (Dan Honig, University College London)
2. [Education systems reforms through X and Y lenses](#) (Dan Honig, University College London)
3. [Rewriting the grammar of the education system: The Delhi case](#) (Yamini Aiyar, Centre for Policy Research)

Required Readings

- Aiyar, Y., Davis, V., Govindan, G., and Kapoor, T. 2021. Rewriting the Grammar of the Education System: Delhi's Education Reform (A Tale of Creative Resistance and Creative Disruption). Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE). https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-Misc_2021/01 (Chapters 4 and 6).
 - Podcast [optional]: <https://riseprogramme.org/podcast/yamini-aiyar>
- Honig, D. 2022. Managing for Motivation as Performance Improvement Strategy: Closing the Implementation Gap in Education & Far Beyond. Centre for International Development Faculty Working Paper Series: 409. <https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/publications/managing-motivation-public-performance-improvement-strategy-education-far-beyond>
 - Webinar with Honig and Aiyar [optional]: <https://riseprogramme.org/events/bureaucratic-barriers-or-administrative-actions-role-bureaucracies-successful-education>
- Pritchett, L. 2014. The Risks to Education Systems from Design Mismatch and Global Isomorphism: Concepts, with Examples from India (WIDER Working Paper). UNU-WIDER. <https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2014/760-8>

Further Readings

- *On the limitations of narrowly standardized, top-down management and the value of purpose-aligned, empowered autonomy in improving education bureaucracies:*
 - Aiyar, Y. and Bhattacharya, S. 2016. The Post Office Paradox. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 51(11), 61–69. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2016/11/special-articles/post-office-paradox.html>
 - Andrews, M., Pritchett, L., and Woolcock, M. 2017. Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oopen.org/search?identifier=624551> – especially Chapter 2: “Looking like a state: The seduction of isomorphic mimicry”
 - Bryk, A. and Schneider, B. 2002. Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement. Russell Sage Foundation. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/15670/>
 - Honig, D., and Pritchett, L. 2019. The Limits of Accounting-Based Accountability in Education (and Far Beyond): Why More Accounting Will Rarely Solve Accountability Problems. RISE Working Paper Series, 19/030. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2019/030
 - Mangla, A. 2014. Bureaucratic Norms and State Capacity in India: Implementing Primary Education in the Himalayan Region. Harvard Business School Working Paper, No. 14-099, April 2014. (Revised October 2015.) https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20Files/Asian_Survey_5505_03_Mangla_219b4d54-2a4f-4a43-a0ab-d632628f8fae.pdf
 - Weick, K. E. 1976. Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 21(1), 1–19. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2391875>
- *Further examples of the shortcomings of isomorphic mimicry in reform:*

- Bano, M. 2022. International Push for SBMCs and the Problem of Isomorphic Mimicry: Evidence from Nigeria. RISE Working Paper Series. 22/102. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2022/102
- Mansoor, Z. 2019. Punjab, Pakistan: A Case Study for Using a Systems Approach for Identifying Constraints to Education Service Delivery. Pathways for Prosperity Commission Background Paper Series No. 30. Oxford. United Kingdom. https://pathwayscommission.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-01/punjab_pakistan_a_case_study.pdf
- Mansoor, Z., Qarout, D., Anderson, K., Carano, C., Yecaló-Teclé, L., Dvorakova, V. and Williams, M. (2021, July). “A Global Mapping of Delivery Approaches.” DeliverEd Initiative Working Paper. Education Commission and Blavatnik School of Government. <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/delivered-report-global-mapping-delivery-approaches>
- Muralidharan, K. and Singh, A. 2020. Improving Public Sector Management at Scale? Experimental Evidence on School Governance in India. RISE Working Paper Series, 20/056. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2020/056
 - Conference presentation video [optional]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CW995lbnkX4&t=23530s&ab_channel=RISEProgramme
- Naviwala, N. 2016. Pakistan’s Education Crisis: The Real Story. In Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED570671>
- *On different levels within the bureaucracy:*
 - Hwa, Y.-Y. and Leaver, C. 2021. Management in Education Systems. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 37(2), 367–391. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grab004> – especially Section III
 - Iyer, P. and Rossiter, J. 2018. Coherent for Equitable Learning? Understanding the Ethiopian Education System. RISE Insight. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-RI_2018/005
- *The middle tier: district officials, circuit supervisors, school inspectors, et al.*
 - Asim, A. and Mundy, K. (forthcoming). Of Agents and Agency: The Missing Middle in Educational Reform in Developing Countries. RISE Working Paper Series
 - Childress, D., Chimier, C., Jones, C., Page, E., and Tournier, B. 2020. Change Agents: Emerging Evidence on Instructional Leadership at the Middle Tier. UNESCO IIEP; Education Development Trust; Education Commission. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374918>
 - Cilliers, J., Dunford, E., and Habyarimana, J. 2021. What Do Local Government Education Managers Do to Boost Learning Outcomes? RISE Working Paper Series, 21/064. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2021/064
 - Ehren, M.C.M. and Visscher, A.J. 2006. Towards a Theory on the Impact of School Inspections. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54(1), 51–72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8527.2006.00333.x>

- *Empirical evidence on the importance of school-level leaders:*
 - Leaver, C., Lemos, R., and Scur, D. 2019. Measuring and Explaining Management in Schools: New Approaches Using Public Data. RISE Working Paper Series, 19/033.
https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2019/033
 - Lemos, R., Muralidharan, K., and Scur, D. 2021. Personnel Management and School Productivity: Evidence from India. RISE Working Paper Series, 21/063.
https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2021/063